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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001870

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA  
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EFIN](#) [KCROR](#) [KCRM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BILATERAL RELATIONS POST-EFCC DEMARCHE

REF: A. ABUJA 1595  
[¶](#)B. STATE 84635

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

[¶](#)11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 14 and September 15 respectively, Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe and newly appointed Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Mahmud Yayale Ahmed. Both Maduekwe and Ahmed expressed their comments and concerns about our bilateral relations in the aftermath of the USG demarche on the EFCC on August 11 (reftel A), saying that the GON thought the USG approach was condescending, insulting, and counterproductive. Each also added that the USG should give EFCC Chairwoman Waziri a chance to prove herself. Ambassador conveyed the need for the EFCC to show real results, and emphasized the importance of President Yar'Adua meeting with SecState during UNGA. Both conversations ended with a renewed recognition of the need for continued dialogue in the face of challenges to the U.S./Nigeria partnership. END SUMMARY.

Meeting with Foreign Minister Maduekwe

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[¶](#)12. (C) The Ambassador met with Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe on evening of September 14 at his residence. During their two-hour meeting the FonMin discussed the state of U.S.-Nigerian relations and provided both his own comments and what he said was the sentiment inside the Villa on recent USG demarche on the EFCC. The Ambassador took the opportunity to note that she and the UK High Commissioner would seek the opportunity to come in together to discuss the Niger Delta and a joint paper on the issue. The Ambassador also left a non-paper with him, after highlighting the key points. A somber FonMin said that we needed to work together to try to get the goodwill in our bilateral relationship back on track after the recent ref A demarche on the EFCC. He added that what ruffled the feathers in the Presidential Villa was not so much our policy issue and position, which we have the right to maintain as a government, but rather the manner, tone, and unfriendly way in which his government felt that the demarche was carried out. He said that the non-paper left behind had been circulated within the Government and even the President was surprised by the tone of the demarche. The Ambassador responded that, with the recent changes and redeployments, the EFCC had turned out to be a disappointment, and that our concerns were meant to

demonstrate our strong interest in getting the institution and leadership to do the right things to move on high profile cases.

¶3. (C) Maduekwe also said he had high hopes that the U.S. and Nigeria had reached a more "adult level" in our bilateral relationship, but the tone and wording of the demarche "challenged not only Nigeria's dignity," but put Nigeria on the level of a "banana republic." The FonMin told the Ambassador he was being frank and honest with her as a colleague and a friend, but noted that his government was concerned about the turn of events, and that the "UK had handled the actions on this far better than the U.S. had, making the same points and discussing the same high profile cases." He added that EFCC Chairwoman Waziri had just returned from London on September 11, where although a strong concern over the EFCC's progress was expressed, the UK offered constructive suggestions on the way forward regarding the same EFCC cases and issues, and "the door was left open to dialogue to give EFCC Chairwoman Waziri a chance to prove herself by moving forward on some of the big pending cases." The FonMin went on to contrast the UK's approach with the USG's, where Nigeria was faced with threats and the discontinuation of training. The Ambassador replied that the EFCC must prove that it can deliver before any door can be reopened. Maduekwe noted that this was unfortunate as there is a current sentiment that Nigeria does not want U.S. training under the current circumstances, and added that Nigeria had worked very closely with the U.S. recently on key issues such as Zimbabwe, and despite a lot of private accolades and thanks, nothing was said publicly by the US to

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recognize Nigeria's efforts. Ambassador responded that we had recognized Nigeria's partnership with the U.S. on Zimbabwe, particularly highlighting a SecState press briefing.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador then noted that the best way to move forward and to further discussions on this and other bilateral issues would be to ensure that President Yar'Adua and SecState meet during the upcoming UNGA, further noting that that we were still waiting for the GON's response to the proposed time for a September 27 meeting. Maduekwe said that the President's plans originally were to return to Nigeria on September 26, but also, in light of how the GON was feeling about the EFCC issue, he questioned if this is the right time for a bilateral between the two. The Ambassador stated that not meeting would not be productive and emphasized that certainly this would be the wrong way to go as it was key to maintain dialogue on this issue not only with him as Foreign Minister, but certainly with the President, so that as partners we can ensure that the international reputation of the EFCC is restored by concluding and prosecuting the pending high profile cases. She added that we are still friends and partners and that a high level dialogue at this time would be fruitful. The FonMin considered this and said that he would work to get the President to add a day to his UNGA travel plans so that he can meet with SecState.

Meeting with SGF Ahmed

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¶5. (C) In a subsequent September 15 meeting with Mahmud Yayale Ahmed, new SGF and the former Defense Minister, the Ambassador began the initial courtesy call by congratulating him on his new appointment, noting that she looked forward to continuing the same positive working relationship she had with him at the Ministry of Defense. She also took the opportunity to present to him the joint U.S.-UK paper on the Niger Delta, noting that it tracked with what she had previously given him in July in offering USG support, if requested, for Niger Delta-related issues. Ahmed was extremely friendly and also welcomed the continued positive and open dialogue as enjoyed before. He then said he wanted to have a private meeting to talk through some the recent issues, most notably the EFCC. Ahmed said our EFCC demarche

points (ref A) had certainly made the rounds within the GON, and then went into what he viewed as a bit of background, the state of play in the government regarding the President's health, and how we needed to work through some of the GON's concerns about the tone of our position on the EFCC. To begin, Ahmed said that his government understood the international community's concern about the EFCC, their respect for Ribadu, and their desire for Nigeria to succeed in its fight against corruption. The SGF added that he agreed with the USG that the Ribadu issue had been handled badly in terms of how he was relieved of his job, and certainly as the former Head of the Civil Service, he strongly disagreed with any attempt to demote him. That being said, despite several warnings by Yar'Adua over the course of many months to tone down his "grandstanding", he refused to respect President Yar'Adua's wishes and in the end lost his position because of it. Ahmed added that what the GON wants now is for the international community in general, and the United States in particular, to give the EFCC Chairwoman a chance to prove herself and do her job. The new SGF said that Nigeria was willing to work with the U.S. on this issue, but there was a manner to go about doing this that was not reflected in the tone and "unfriendly" points in the ref A demarche. "We Nigerians," Ahmed emphasized, "are very proud and can be very stubborn if we feel that our dignity and respect has been challenged."

¶6. (C) In response, the Ambassador underscored that the USG believed that without such strong terms our seriousness on this issue would not have been heeded. Ahmed noted he understood our seriousness, but there was a way in which to go about working with friends. He also added that we should not underestimate President Yar'Adua because, despite his quiet demeanor, he can be quite tough when he believes that he has been insulted or disrespected. The Ambassador stated that this was not the USG's intention, but emphasized that we

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did want to see action and closure on the big pending cases like ex-Delta Governor Ibori. She then asked why the President would associate himself with someone under suspicion, such as Ibori, noting that we understand that he has access to the Villa. In our system, she added, there is a distance put between anyone under suspicion of breaking any laws and senior USG officials. Ahmed said that the USG should not confuse Yar'Adua's commitment to the rule of law with his granting of access to Ibori. He said that there is a Nigerian context and a Nigerian reality that anyone in Yar'Adua's position has to manage. The President has decided it was better to give Ibori managed access than none at all. The Ambassador noted that all this created uneasiness for us and that we would continue to keep our distance from the EFCC until we saw progress. Ahmed said he thought this was the wrong approach as the only way to move forward was via dialogue, and that included giving Mrs. Waziri a chance. Ambassador and Ahmed ended the meeting by agreeing to continue their conversation on this issue. Ahmed also noted that Yar'Adua had asked him to take over a lot of the day-to-day Executive responsibilities due to his health, and the new SGF said he would like to come to the U.S. in October so that he could meet directly with senior USG officials in his new capacity as SGF. The Ambassador said she would pass on that message.

SANDERS